

Year C
Third Sunday in Ordinary Time
(Neh 8:2-4a, 5-6, 8-10; Ps 19; 1 Cor 12:412-30; Lk 1:1-4)

This Sunday's readings are about new beginnings. The reading from Nehemiah, in the last two books of the Jewish Bible (our "Old Testament," but in a different order), tells how the Jewish community after the Babylonian Exile got itself together and, under the leadership of two great reformers, Ezra and Nehemiah, listened to the reading of the whole Torah (our Pentateuch). This was to be their constitution as God's holy people forevermore. It needed explanation and even translation (it was in Hebrew, and the people now spoke Aramaic). Everyone was very moved at hearing the ancient words of Moses, and the people, humbled by suffering, cried, but they were told instead to celebrate, for it was a holy day, one for rejoicing.

However, things remained much the same after that, and the hoped for turnabout did not come. The prophet Isaiah had prophesied a final Jubilee year, when all exiles, debts and suffering would be over, and all sins forgiven (the Jubilee took place on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, Lev 25:8-17). This would be accomplished by a "messiah [anointed] of the Spirit, who would announce "Good News" (an end-of-exile term, Is 40:9; 52:7-12) to the humble (the *'anawim*, often translated "poor"). Jesus, thus anointed by the Spirit (Acts 10:38), goes to his home town and reads this passage from Isaiah. But he now proclaims its fulfillment, "today, as you hear it." With Jesus, there is no more waiting, but rather the power to bring to fruition what we have received from him (cf. Acts 13:2; 14:26; 15:38). We can be certain of the basis of our faith by the accurate testimony of which Luke speaks about in the beginning of his gospel.

What is the great work Christians are to do? It is do act upon our faith (cf. Jn 4:34; 6:28-29; 13:17; 15:14) in healing the divisions in the body of Christ and in the world (Mt 25:31-46). Each of us has a role in this, according to the gifts he or she has been given. This requires discerning Christ himself in the members of his body.